

Comments of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
South Coast Air Quality Management District
S. Roy Wilson Memorial Award for Leadership in Government
October 3, 2014

It's an honor to accept this award from the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

I want to begin by thanking Dr. Barry Wallerstein, who has led AQMD for over seventeen years, and has been with the agency even longer. Barry, I have relied on your technical expertise and appreciated your leadership in making AQMD the incredibly effective agency it is today.

I would also like to thank the Board members. Collectively, you adopt clean air programs and regulations that lead the nation in applying cutting-edge solutions to air quality problems.

And finally, I thank the staff of AQMD. Every day, you go to work to clean up the air where we live. Millions of people are healthier and have better lives as a result of your work, and you should be very proud of that.

I'm being honored with the S. Roy Wilson Memorial Award for Leadership in Government, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to share a few thoughts about government.

It's so easy today for people to be negative about politicians ... electoral politics ... and government. They see a gridlocked Congress, relentless criticism of government workers, and halting progress on climate change. And it's easy to take for granted all the things government has done well to make people's lives better.

I believe that we must never take our government for granted, and we must never cease our efforts to make it a force for good in people's lives.

And that's what I have tried to do throughout my career. Of the many pieces of legislation that I have worked to pass into law, one of the bills of which I'm most proud is the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.

Those amendments took a good law and made it stronger. It gave both the federal government and state and local governments more and better tools to clean up the air. We emphasized the use of market mechanisms, to achieve air quality improvements as cost-effectively as possible. And we continued to rely on state and local air quality regulators, such as AQMD, to turn the law into the programs that actually reduce pollution every day. The result is that Americans across this country, and particularly here in southern California, have fewer heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks, hospital admissions, and premature deaths.

When I talk about government as a force for good in people's lives, the Clean Air Act, and all your work to implement it, are exactly what I have in mind.

Of course, the job of government is never done. In addition to continuing to clean up smog and particulates, it is now imperative that we sharply reduce carbon pollution. I will look to the South Coast Air Quality Management District to lead the nation in that fight as well.

And that makes me especially honored to be receiving this award. I am grateful for the recognition you have given me ... and even more so for all the crucial work you are doing to protect our environment for our children and grandchildren.